

Research Update is published by the Butler Center for Research to share significant scientific findings from the field of addiction treatment research.

RESEARCH UPDATE

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Helping Families Cope with Substance Dependence

Alcohol and drug dependence impacts millions of people each year. Not only do individuals with addiction suffer, but family and friends frequently experience depression, anxiety, and stress (Hall & Webster, 2002; MacPherson, Stewart, & McWilliams, 2001). Self-help groups and professional interventions are often effective in helping family members and friends cope with the impact of a loved one's addiction.

Self-help Groups

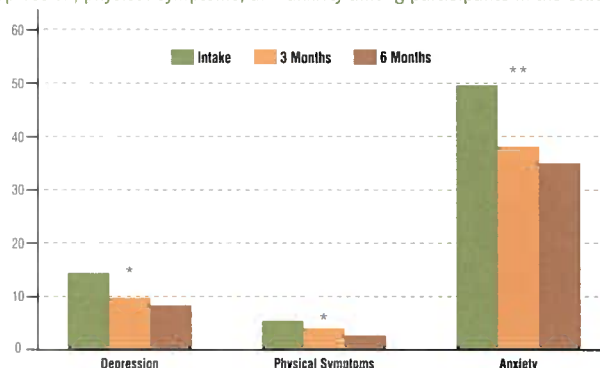
Family members and significant others of alcohol and/or drug dependent people find support in self-help groups. Al-Anon, the family counterpart to Alcoholics Anonymous, is a fellowship of people who have been affected by a loved one's addiction. Founded in 1951, Al-Anon and its related group for teenagers, Alateen, have grown to over 26,000 meetings in 115 countries (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 2004). Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) is also a source of help, with over 1,500 groups worldwide (Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization, 2004).

These organizations view alcoholism and drug dependence as a disease that can cause fear, resentment, anger, and loneliness among family members and significant others. Based on the Twelve Step philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous, these groups provide relatives and friends with the opportunity to discuss their experiences and provide support and encouragement to one another. Preliminary evidence suggests these groups are effective in easing the stress associated with having a loved one with alcohol and drug dependence.

Keinz and colleagues (Keinz et al., 1995) surveyed 77 Al-Anon members to assess whether program involvement was related to marital adjustment. Greater length of membership was associated with improved marital satisfaction.

McBride (1992) surveyed 50 Alcoholics Anonymous members about family participation in

FIGURE
Changes in depression, physical symptoms, and anxiety among participants in the CRAFT program.



*p < .05. **p < .01. Note: Depression, physical symptoms, and anxiety were measured on three separate scales, hence the difference in scale scores.

SOURCE: Meyers, R. J., Miller, W. R., Hill, D. E., & Tonigan, J. S. (1999). Community reinforcement and family training (CRAFT): Engaging unmotivated drug users in treatment. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 10, 291-308.

THE HAZELDEN EXPERIENCE

Drs. Robert Meyers and Howard Liddle, whose work is reviewed in this issue, received the Dan Anderson Research Award from the Butler Center for Research in 2002 and 2003, respectively. Hazelden's Minnesota Mental Health Centers offer the CRAFT intervention to concerned significant others, and Hazelden publishes Dr. Meyers' self-help book, *Get Your Loved One Sober: Alternatives to Nagging, Pleading, and Threatening*.

CONTROVERSIES & QUESTIONS

Where can family members find help?

Many treatment centers offer programs for relatives and friends of substance dependent people. For example, Hazelden's Family Programs help attendees better understand addiction, treatment, recovery, and family dynamics. Participants learn about healthy relationships and develop skills to change their responses to family situations. Family members can also seek help from therapists at their local mental health centers.

What happens to the family when the substance dependent person stops drinking or using?

Troubled families may believe their problems will be resolved once the substance dependent person stops drinking or using. Recovery can bring a new set of issues and can be a tumultuous time as everyone adjusts to a new way of living. Families may find professional counseling or the support available through Al-Anon and other groups to be helpful in the transition.

HOW TO USE THIS INFORMATION

- **Family Members:** Help for you exists, too, and can be effective in reducing the stress and other difficulties you may be experiencing associated with a loved one's alcohol and drug addiction.
- **Clinicians:** Provide support to the family and significant others of substance dependent people. Familiarize yourself with specialized resources in your community and refer when appropriate.
- **Researchers:** Continue to develop and evaluate methods to provide help for family members and significant others.

Helping Families Cope with Substance Dependence

Al-Anon. Longer Al-Anon attendance by a family member was correlated with lower family stress scores, overall.

In a randomized, controlled study conducted by Barber & Gilbertson (1996), people who attended Al-Anon had significantly greater reductions in the number of personal problems experienced compared to those assigned to a wait-list control condition. In a separate study of ACOA participants conducted by Kingree (2000), increases in self-esteem and reductions in self-stigmatization—the tendency to negatively evaluate oneself as a result of being a child of an alcoholic—were observed.

While the majority of studies lack control groups, which makes it difficult to form scientific conclusions regarding Al-Anon or ACOA, the preliminary data discussed above are encouraging because they suggest a positive impact from attendance at support groups such as Al-Anon and ACOA.

Professional Intervention

Professionally led groups and programs are also helpful for the relatives of alcohol and drug dependent people. One study found significant reductions in loneliness, anxiety, and depression symptoms among adult children of alcoholics participating in an eight-week group therapy program offered at a university counseling center (Cooper & McCormack, 1992).

Treatment of alcohol and drug abusing youth within a family context has been found to benefit the family as a whole. In a randomized study of Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) conducted by Liddle and colleagues (2001), 182 adolescents were assigned to MDFT, a standard group therapy condition, or to a multifamily education group. Significant improvement in family functioning was noted for the MDFT group, which moved from “incompetent” functioning to “competent” ratings. Families in the standard group showed no change and those in the education-only condition worsened over time.

Meyers and colleagues (1999) developed Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT), a professionally led method specifically for family members. CRAFT assists family members and partners in helping their alcohol and drug abusing loved ones get into treatment. In addition to behavioral skills training designed specifically to facilitate their loved one's entry into treatment, concerned significant others (CSOs) learn adaptive skills designed to improve the quality of their own lives.

Not only is the CRAFT approach effective in getting people into treatment, it helps family members and significant others. In one study of 62 CSOs, significant drops in depression, anger, physical symptoms, and anxiety occurred among CSOs during and following the course of a 12-session CRAFT program (See Figure; Meyers et al., 1999). These improvements occurred regardless of whether the alcohol or drug abusing loved one entered treatment or not. These positive effects have been replicated in larger trials testing the benefits of the CRAFT approach (Meyers et al., 2002; Miller, Meyers, & Tonigan, 1999).

Summary

Family and friends of substance dependent people are often negatively impacted by the disease of alcohol and drug dependence. Research shows that therapy and self-help groups are a helpful resource. Whether through professional treatment, a self-help program of mutual support, or a combination of both, help is available to ease stress and improve the lives for those coping with the substance dependence of a loved one.

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The Butler Center for Research informs and improves recovery services and produces research that benefits the field of addiction treatment. We are dedicated to conducting clinical research, collaborating with external researchers, and communicating scientific findings.

Valeria Slaymaker, Ph.D., Director

If you have questions, or would like to request copies of Research Update, please call 800-257-7800 ext. 4405, email butlerresearch@hazelden.org, or write BC 4, P.O. Box 11, Center City, MN 55012-0011.

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